

VZCZCXRO1229
PP RUEHAST RUEHDBU RUEHFL RUEHLA RUEHLN RUEHMRE RUEHROV RUEHSR RUEHVK
RUEHYG
DE RUEHKB #0067 0291043
ZNR UUUUU ZZH
P 291043Z JAN 07
FM AMEMBASSY BAKU
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 2203
INFO RUCNCIS/CIS COLLECTIVE PRIORITY
RUCNOSC/OSCE COLLECTIVE PRIORITY

UNCLAS BAKU 000067

SIPDIS

SENSITIVE
SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: N/A
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PHUM](#) [KDEM](#) [CASC](#) [ASEC](#) [AJ](#)
SUBJECT: FIRST SANCTIONED OPPOSITION PROTEST SINCE NOVEMBER
2005 GOES SMOOTHLY

REF: A. BAKU 125

[1](#)B. 06 BAKU 1704

SENSITIVE BUT UNCLASSIFIED; NOT FOR INTERNET DISTRIBUTION

[1](#)1. (SBU) On January 28, the opposition Musavat Party held a peaceful, sanctioned protest, in response to the Tariff Council's decision to raise utilities prices. This was the first sanctioned protest since police violently dispersed a peaceful, sanctioned opposition rally on November 26, 2005 (see ref t e l s). The protest was well organized, and we estimate that attendance peaked at 600 participants. Protesters gathered at a metro station on the outskirts of Baku, and marched a short distance to Ukraine Circle (which is on the GOAJ's list of "approved" protest locations - see ref b) while chanting variations of "Musavat" and "lower prices." We noted only a handful of representatives from other parties; the vast majority of the crowd seemed to be directly affiliated with Musavat. While there was a heavy police presence - approximately 500 police deployed at the protest site - we did not observe any clashes between police and protesters. The crowd peacefully and promptly dispersed at the end of its approved two-hour time slot.

[1](#)2. (SBU) Separately, on January 26, the opposition Azadliq bloc held an unsanctioned protest also in response to recent price increases. Although the coalition had applied in advance with the Baku Mayor's Office to hold a protest, none of the eight proposed sites were on the list of "approved" protest locations. Azadliq's request to demonstrate was denied in a January 24 letter from the Mayor's Office, but coalition leaders decided to move forward with protest plans regardless. Azadliq officials did not publicly release the exact location of the protest in advance; rather, they announced that it would be held in any one of the eight locations outlined in the official protest application.

[1](#)3. (SBU) Azadliq members carried out a short, chaotic protest in front of the State Property Committee building, located about ten minutes from downtown Baku. We estimate that between 30 and 40 protesters attended, and the picket resulted in 15 detentions. We did not witness police using excessive force, however, the protest resulted in a few injuries (most likely from the chaotic behavior of the crowd). Most of the detainees were released within several hours; five were fined 22 AZN (USD 25) and released later that evening. Popular Front Party Press Representative Isaq Avazoglu told the press that the protest was a success.

[1](#)4. (SBU) COMMENT: The GOAJ's decision to allow Musavat to carry out a protest rally was a very positive development. We will continue to emphasize the importance of full restoration of freedom of assembly in our dialogue with the GOAJ.
DERSE